



**NORTH DAKOTA**  
DEPARTMENT *of* HEALTH

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## NEWS RELEASE

For Immediate Release:  
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### **North Dakota Observes National Native HIV/AIDS Awareness Day**

BISMARCK, N.D. – March 20, 2008, marks the second annual observance of the National Native HIV/AIDS Awareness Day (NNHAAD), according to Denise Larson, HIV prevention coordinator for the North Dakota Department of Health.

Native communities selected the first day of spring to commemorate NNHAAD because it marks a time of renewal and represents a time of equality and balance. “This day is a ‘celebration of life’ and is a great opportunity to raise awareness about the impact of HIV/AIDS on Native people,” Larson said.

While American Indians, Alaska Natives and Native Hawaiians represent approximately 1.2 percent of the U.S. population, they historically suffer higher rates of health disparities, including HIV/AIDS. HIV continues to increase among Native people, as it has over the past decade; in fact, American Indians and Alaska Natives (AI/AN) had the third-highest rate per 100,000 people (above whites) of AIDS diagnoses in 2005, despite having the smallest population.

According to Department of Health statistics, 166 people infected with HIV/AIDS were known to be living in North Dakota in 2007. Of those, 10 percent were American Indian.

The national observation of NNHAAD is designed to (1) encourage Native people to learn more about HIV/AIDS and its impact in their communities; (2) encourage HIV counseling and testing options in Native communities; and (3) help decrease the stigma associated with HIV/AIDS.

To support this year’s NNHAAD and national mobilization effort, the Department of Health encourages North Dakotans to learn more about HIV/AIDS and to get tested for HIV, especially

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anyone who has ever put himself or herself at risk for HIV by engaging in risky behavior. Risky behavior includes unprotected sex, needle-sharing for drug use, or tattooing and body piercing. According to Larson, it is important to know your status in order to protect yourself and others. HIV testing is provided free of charge at test sites throughout the state.

For information about HIV testing and other HIV/AIDS services, call the North Dakota Department of Health HIV/AIDS Program hotline at 800.70.NDHIV or visit the program's website at [www.ndhealth.gov/hiv](http://www.ndhealth.gov/hiv).

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